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ENERGY AND COMMERCE COMMITTEE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON HEALTH

SUBCOMMITTEE ON DIGITAL COMMERCE AND
CONSUMER PROTECTION

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

January 17, 2019

The Honorable Sonny Perdue
Secretary
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave., S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20250

Dear Secretary Perdue:

I write to you extremely concerned by the immediate impact the partial government shutdown is having on the Pecos Valley Medical Center (PVMC) in Pecos, New Mexico. Pecos is a village of less than 2,000 people in a beautiful part of our country.

PVMC is a not-for-profit community health center serving 3,600 patients a year. The Center serves an area of over 500 square miles in North Central New Mexico that has been designated a Medical, Mental Health and Dental underserved area and Health Professional Shortage area for over 15 years. The Center has been providing medical services for the community since the mid-1970s, including, dental and behavioral health services, such as addiction treatment, support groups, and suicide prevention programs. PVMC is the only primary care provider in a service area where 60 percent of the community lives in poverty. The health center is also the largest employer in the area.

Recently, PVMC received a \$3.2 million loan from the USDA Rural Development Program to complete the second phase of a building expansion to add an additional 9,000 square feet to the Center and bring all of its services under one roof. The creation of a second floor in the health center will allow the Center to expand services and hire additional employees.

The PVMC expansion would allow the Center to grow vital programs to treat trauma, help community members enroll in Medicaid, and create a space for after-school activities for students. Due to the increased demand for substance abuse and mental health treatment, the additional space is needed to ensure timely access to care. The USDA specifically invested in PVMC because the Center was identified as a rural leader that would drastically enhance the community with improved health care infrastructure and services. PVMC's expansion is critical, not only to the local Pecos community and residents, but to the entirety of San Miguel County.

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Despite the importance of this health center, the future of PVMC's expansion is in jeopardy due to the partial government shutdown. USDA required PVMC to obtain interim financing during construction as well as approval on all pay requests before draws from the bank are processed. The project officer assigned to this loan has been on furlough since late December and is unable to approve the withdrawal of funds necessary to fulfill current and future invoices. On January 16, the project's contractor informed the health center that unless these invoices can be processed by January 21, 2019, their contract will be terminated, and the expansion will not be completed. This action will have a significant impact on the schedule and overall cost of the vital PVMC expansion.

Given the urgency of this situation, I am seeking clarification and guidance on behalf of the Center.

I am requesting that, within the next 24 hours, USDA allow PVMC the ability to withdraw funds without project manager approval during the government shutdown and until the USDA reopens. Without approval of this request, the vital construction project is in jeopardy.

Thank you very much for your attention to this matter. Again, due to the immediacy of this issue, please respond within 24 hours or by Friday, January 18, 2019 at 4:00pm.

Sincerely,



Ben Ray Luján
Assistant Speaker
U.S. House of Representatives